

**BEFORE
THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
DOCKET NO. 2019-281-S**

IN RE:)
)
Application of Palmetto Utilities, Inc. for)
adjustment of rates and charges for, and)
modification to certain terms and conditions)
related to, the provision of sewer service.)

**PREFILED DIRECT TESTIMONY
OF
ANDRENA POWELL-BAKER
ON BEHALF OF PALMETTO
UTILITIES, INC.**

1 **Q. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME, PRESENT POSITION, AND BUSINESS ADDRESS.**

2 A. My name is Andrena Powell-Baker. I am the Senior Manager of Community Relations
3 and Development for Palmetto Utilities, Inc. ("PUI"). My business address is 420 River
4 Street, Lockhart, South Carolina, 29364.

6 **Q. WHAT IS YOUR EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND?**

7 A. I obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Winthrop
8 University in 1981. I am a South Carolina Certified Economic Developer with skills and
9 experience in industrial site development, negotiations, public relations, project
10 management, community development, customer service, marketing strategies, and
11 business development. I have more than 30 years of business development and
12 marketing experience in the private sector. In addition, I have over eleven years of
13 economic development experience in industrial recruitment and retention in the
14 public/municipal sector. In particular, I have served as the Executive Director for a
15 public economic development organization and collaborated extensively with both
16 public and private utility companies.

17
18 I began working with PUI in January 2016. I also serve in a similar capacity for Palmetto
19 Wastewater Reclamation, LLC., a regulated wastewater utility, and Lockhart Power
20 Company, a regulated electric utility, which, like PUI's indirect parent, Ni Pacolet

1 Milliken Utilities, LLC, is owned by Pacolet Milliken LLC ("Pacolet"). Pacolet is a
2 South Carolina headquartered company that is owned principally by the Milliken
3 family.
4

5 **Q. WHAT ARE YOUR BUSINESS DUTIES IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION?**

6 A. As Senior Manager of Community Relations and Development, I am responsible for
7 serving as the liaison for PUI with regulators, customers, prospective customers, the
8 media and the general public. When the need arises, my duties include coordinating
9 meetings between operating personnel and regulators as well as customers. I also handle
10 customer complaints or issues that escalate to the Office of Regulatory Staff ("ORS")
11 or South Carolina Public Service Commission ("Commission"). I act as PUI's
12 spokesperson with the media and attend ORS and Commission meetings on behalf of
13 PUI when appropriate. When necessary, I testify in Commission hearings. I coordinate
14 any requested presentations on behalf of PUI at these meetings. My responsibilities also
15 include monitoring matters before state agencies and legislatures as they relate to our
16 operating subsidiaries. I work closely with staff to initiate and coordinate community
17 support activities.
18

19 In the capacity of Manager of Business Development, my duties include marketing the
20 assets and capabilities of PUI in an effort to generate business growth opportunities.
21 These business opportunities benefit the local economy and tax base. I also meet with,
22 develop, and nurture relationships with local and state officials and professionals in the
23 area of economic development. I coordinate meetings with site selection consultants and
24 developers to uncover, initiate and participate in business development activities on
25 behalf of the company. I am a member of the Building Industry Association of Central
26 SC whose membership includes over 800 builder and associate firms representing over
27 7,500 industry professionals who build and remodel homes and other aspects of
28 residential and light commercial construction. The organization also includes members
29 who represent multifamily construction, property management, subcontracting, design,
30 housing finance, and building product manufacturing. We are a sponsor of their annual

1 Home and Garden Show where we educate developers, potential customers and
2 attendees about PUI. I am currently the President of the South Carolina Economic
3 Developers' (SCEDA) association, which has over 800 members, including local and
4 regional economic developers, as well as officials from municipal, county and state
5 government agencies, construction and engineering firms, utility companies, attorneys,
6 consultants, financial institutions, and higher education. SCEDA's mission to enhance
7 the professional development of its membership and to advocate economic development
8 to benefit the citizens of South Carolina.

9
10 **Q. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY?**

11 A. The purpose of my testimony is to support PUI's application for an increase in its
12 authorized sewer rates. Specifically, I will be discussing (1) PUI's efforts to educate
13 customers about the rate relief proceedings in general, (2) PUI's commitment to
14 customers, neighbors, and the community, (3) the metrics PUI uses to judge the
15 performance of its customer service group, and (4) PUI's efforts to develop and
16 maintain a list of reliable customer assistance resources in our service territory.

17
18 **Q. WHAT HAS PUI DONE TO EDUCATE AND INFORM ITS CUSTOMERS ABOUT THIS RATE
19 INCREASE?**

20 A. The Company posted copies of the Commission's Revised Notice of Filing and Hearing
21 and pre-filed testimony deadlines, the Commission's Notice of Public Night Hearing,
22 and our Application to the Commission on our website. To further educate our customers, we
23 also posted on our website documents containing frequently asked questions regarding the
24 Application, dates and locations of our Town Hall Meetings, the presentation given at the Town
25 Hall Meetings, and the Company's 3-Part phase-in plan. A separate notification was
26 mailed on January 13, 2020 inviting customers to attend three Town Hall Meetings
27 (January 28, 2020 (3:30pm – 5:00pm); January 28, 2020 (6:00pm – 7:30pm) and
28 Wednesday, January 29, 2020 (6:00pm – 7:30pm). The number of attendees who
29 showed up for the January 28 3:30pm-5:00pm meeting warranted us hosting a third
30 meeting on that date at 4:30pm to accommodate all customers who wished to participate.

1 The purpose of the meetings was to provide customers with the details of why an
2 increase was necessary and to give them an opportunity to have their questions answered
3 by senior PUI representatives. President and Chief Financial Officer Mark Daday, Chief
4 Operating Officer Bryan Stone, and I were in attendance to facilitate the January 28
5 meetings. Mr. Daday and Mr. Stone were in attendance to facilitate the January 29
6 meeting. Also in attendance at the January 29 meeting was PUI's Controller, Lizzie
7 Wright. The January 28 meetings were also attended by PUI Customer Service and
8 Billing representatives and our Controller.

9
10 Our Sign-In sheets indicate that there were 204 attendees at the January 28, 3:30pm
11 meeting; 107 attendees at the January 28, 4:30pm meeting; and 206 attendees at the
12 January 28, 6:00pm meeting. There were 117 attendees who signed in at the January 29
13 meeting. A detailed PowerPoint presentation was delivered providing an overview of
14 (1) the capital projects and costs associated with them, (2) the specifics about why PUI
15 was not granted the full amount of requested rate increase in 2017, (3) the need for this
16 rate increase, (4) rate case process, and (3) a comparison of PUI's rates to nearby
17 utilities. Customers asked questions throughout the presentations which we responded
18 to as they were being asked.

19
20 Each meeting was followed with an invitation to have open one-on-one dialogue with
21 any member of our senior team as well as other team members. A total of 9 customers
22 approached our team during the course of the 4 meetings. Three wanted to know who
23 their County Council Member was; three wanted to know if we would be mailing
24 notifications about the Public Hearings; one wanted to know where to go for assistance
25 for paying utility bills; one wanted to know the capital projects approval process and
26 what information falls under FOIA; and one had issues with accessing their account
27 online. Each of these customers received a follow up telephone call. Two customers
28 were not available after several attempts and voice messages were left answering their
29 questions. One customer had no voice mail. Customers who had questions about their
30 County Council Member and the Public Hearings were provided answers and

1 information they requested. The customer who requested assistance was provided phone
2 numbers to Wateree Community Actions, United Way of Midlands, Area Agency on
3 Aging, and Central Midlands Council of Governments A copy of the Town Hall
4 Meeting notifications and the PowerPoint presentations are attached to my testimony as
5 APB Direct Exhibits "1" and "2," respectively.
6

7 **Q. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO CONTINUE PUI'S COMMITMENT TO STRONG CUSTOMER**
8 **SERVICES LEVELS SINCE THE LAST RATE CASE?**

9 A. Since the 2017 rate case, we have redesigned and launched a new, more
10 customer-focused website making it easier for customers to pay on-line and access
11 important information in a timely manner. In addition, after listening to our customers,
12 we have made a commitment to formalize our customer assistance initiative. This
13 formal initiative will consist of creating and vetting a list of providers in our service
14 territory who are willing to help customers with utility bill assistance, rental assistance,
15 financial counseling, and educational & employment opportunities. Customers who are
16 experiencing a true hardship and desire for assistance will be referred to these assistance
17 providers. We will also make the list available and visible to customers in our lobby and
18 on our website.
19

20 **Q. WHAT METRICS DO YOU USE TO TRACK PUI'S CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT**
21 **PERFORMANCE?**

22 A. We operate a hybrid customer service center, which consists of a call center and
23 various support functions, a walk-up window and billing services, and a third-party
24 after hours answering and support service. The customer service center serves PUI as
25 well as our other systems. The metrics that we use specifically identify how our
26 customer service representatives ("CSRs") respond to telephone calls from customers.
27 Another relevant parameter for the hybrid customer service operation is the number of
28 calls received. There are specific performance goals for the department measured by
29 three metrics: average ring time, average talk time, and abandoned calls. Data for
30 2017-2019 shows that on average, CSR's handle just under 3,000 calls per month. The

average pick-up time is within 7.5 seconds and average talk time is 2.82 minutes. This data demonstrates a significant improvement, since the last rate case, in average talk time, which was just over 4 minutes.

Q. WHAT METRICS DO YOU USE TO TRACK INDIVIDUAL CSR PERFORMANCE?

A. CSR performance is tracked according to 1) number of calls received, 2) number of calls completed, 3) average ring time, 4) average talk time, and 5) abandoned call percentage. Additionally, calls with customers are monitored and each CSR is graded weekly based on the following additional criteria: (1) initiate and educate: (how do they greet the customer, do they obtain their name and use it to make the call personal, do they inquire as to the nature of the call and do they ask how they can be of assistance); (2) obtain details (do they explain account status, offering concise details and what they can do to help resolve the situation); and (3) summary and close (do they briefly recap the conversation and ask if any further assistance is needed).

Q. HOW MANY PERSONNEL ARE DEVOTED TO CUSTOMER SERVICE FUNCTIONS?

A. Currently, there are four CSRs who cover the telephone for the four water/sewer utility systems operated by Ni Pacolet Milliken Utilities, Inc. One of the four CSR's accepts applications and manages the CSR Inbox as well as helping with call overflow. One collection specialist also serves as back up for the front counter.

Q. DOES PUI AND ITS EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATE IN ANY COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES?

A. Yes. As mentioned previously, PUI was acquired by Pacolet Milliken. Ni Pacolet's management team brought with it Pacolet Milliken's culture, which includes a strong focus on community service and environmental sustainability. In addition to providing over 40 years of job creation, Ni Pacolet and/or its employees participate in, sponsor, and make charitable donations to numerous community organizations, including the Palmetto Health Breast Cancer Foundation, Junior Shriners, National Child Safety Council, Cancer Walk for Life, American Cancer Society's Relay for Life, the Richland

1 County Sheriff's Department K-9 Unit, Families Helping Families, and Annual Back
2 to School Back Pack Drive

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4 **Q. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR TESTIMONY?**

5 **A.** Yes, it does.